

LOVE

by

Fr. Photios+ (W)

Love is central to true Christianity, not the love of things- this secular ‘love’ blinds us to true love, the greatest love- God’s love for us. The Father gave us His Son because he loves us. He redeems us in love by His Passion so we can live through Him, giving ourselves to Him and to each other:

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.¹

...

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.²

...

We love Him, because He first loved us.³

...

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.⁴

St. John the Evangelist, the beloved disciple Christ loved,⁵ writes movingly (above) about love, God’s love for us, and the reciprocity love entails as well as the necessity of loving one’s neighbour. Christ requires we love each other as He loves us:

A *new* [emphasis supplied] commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love to one another.⁶

Christ emphasises love is very special! We ask the rhetorical question “why?” Saint Gregory the Great answered this question:

Why does He speak of love as if it were a special commandment? It is because every commandment is about love, and they all add up to one commandment because whatever is commanded is founded on love *alone*. The branch which is our good works has no sap unless it remains attached to the *root* of love. (emphases supplied)⁷

Christ’s love sets the standard of love we must have for our neighbours. Indeed, Christ has set the bar high since He vividly demonstrated His love for us on the Cross. We are to love one another as Christ has loved (and loves) us. A tall order...

Who are our neighbours? Everybody. All we come into contact with are neighbours. They aren’t limited to those immediately around us like relatives, friends and work colleagues. When we love our neighbours, we love God: “Love of God is founded on love of one’s neighbour.”⁸

Love is truly the hallmark of a Christian and is “granted by the Holy Spirit to those who seek and achieve it.”⁹ Our love must be unconditional- for everyone- even our enemies or those who are indifferent toward us. The most spiritual St. Maximus the Confessor puts it succinctly:

We must love every person with all our hearts, place our trust in God, and serve *only* Him with all our strength. For, while He protects us, all our friends will remain favorable, while our enemies will be powerless. When He departs from us, then will our friends turn from us and our enemies secure ascendancy over us. Friends of Christ genuinely love all, though they themselves are *not* beloved at all (emphases supplied).¹⁰

The relationship between God’s love for us and love for our neighbours has been expressed in terms that all of us can understand by the Blessed Theophylact in his *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to St. Mark*:

How are these two commandments alike? In that the two commandments are held together by each other. He who loves God, also loves God’s creation; and that part of His creation which is the most akin to God is man. Therefore he who loves God will also love all mankind. And shall not he who loves his neighbor love God all the more? For if he loves men, who so often cause offence and bear hatred, how much more will he love God Who is always his Benefactor? Listen to what the Lord says also: ‘He who loves me will keep My commandments.’ See that it is out of love for God that we keep His commandments, and that the substance of His commandments is that we love one another. And again, ‘By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.’ Do you see again that for us to love Christ, and to be His disciples and friends, comes from loving each other?¹¹

Love is the greatest blessing since it joins us with Christ.¹² The Father gave us His Son because of His love for us. Love united with the “more than infinite” Christ remains for ever and ever, unto all ages, ever increasing “beyond all measure”. Love is supreme, the greatest of them all!¹³ We must love Him through loving all our neighbours equally. If we fail to love our neighbours, we cannot love the Lord.¹⁴

Brethren, let us commit ourselves today to our neighbours, and thus to Christ!

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ I John 4:7-11

² I John 4: 15

³ I John 4:19

⁴ I John 4: 20-21

⁵ John 13:23

⁶ John 13:34-35

⁷ *The Orthodox New Testament, The Holy Gospels, Vol. 1, Evangelistarion* (Second Edition), Holy Apostles/ Dormition Skete, Buena Vista, CO, 2000, fn 292, p.536, in explanation of St. John 15:12 (“This is My commandment, that ye be loving one another, even as I loved you.”- emphasis supplied), quoted from St. Gregory’s “Hom. 27,” *Forty Gospel Homilies*, 212; cf. Hom. 27, P.L. 76 (1205).

⁸ Bishop +Ignatius (Brianchaninov) +1867, *Love of God*, ed. Bishop +Alexander (Mileant), Missionary Leaflet #E67b, Holy Trinity Orthodox Mission, La Canada, CA, p.2. at http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/love_god_ext.htm.

⁹ Bishop +Alexander (Mileant), tr. by Seraphim Larin, *LOVE The Queen of Virtues*, Missionary Leaflet #E67, Holy Trinity Orthodox Mission, La Canada, CA, 2001, p.7. at http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/love_e.htm.

¹⁰ Bishop +Alexander quoting him in his Conclusion, *id.*, p.19.

¹¹ Bl. Theophylact explaining the meaning of St. Mark 12:28-34, tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1993, 2nd printing 1997, pp.106-107.

¹² St. Maximos the Confessor in *The Philokalia The Complete Text, Volume Two* (compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth), tr. from the Greek and edited by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware, assisted by The Holy Transfiguration Monastery – Brookline), Faber & Faber Limited, London, 1990 (paperback), No. 29, p.271. Author’s note- St. Maximos has more space in *The Philokalia* than any other Saint- most of Volume Two are his writings.

¹³ *id.*, No. 100, p.99.

¹⁴ *id.*, No. 16, p.54.